



USAID
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BOLIVIA

CASE STUDY

Reducing Malaria in Mobile Populations

Deep in the Bolivian jungle rapid tests and immediate treatment of malaria are helping Brazil nut harvesters to be healthier and more productive



Photo: PROSIN/USAID

Dr. Viterman Ali during a training session to teach health providers and indigenous voluntary health workers how to use a malaria rapid test

"Through the Amazon Malaria Initiative, USAID and its partners have provided the necessary support to achieve an important breakthrough in the prevention and control of malaria among mobile populations".

*Dr. Viterman Ali, MD
Project Investigator*

Challenge

Malaria represents a significant health problem in Bolivia, affecting over 3.5 million people who live within the malaria-endemic area that covers three-fourths of the country. In the Amazon basin departments of Beni and Pando, malaria rates are the highest in the country. Migratory worker populations, such as "castañeros" (Brazil nut harvesters), run a particular risk of malaria infection, and then can easily spread the infection within their families and home communities.

Malaria not only causes enormous preventable suffering and death, but also has economic implications in this struggling South America country. Bolivia supplies about 80% of the global Brazil nut market. The nuts have an annual total market value of approximately \$48 million and are a leading export of the Bolivian Amazon region, benefiting at least 15,000 families from rural areas. When castañeros are sick and cannot work, family income drops and communities suffer.

Initiative

As part of the USAID/PAHO Amazon Malaria Initiative (AMI) in Bolivia, the Ministry of Health conducted a pilot study, and trained local health providers and indigenous voluntary health workers. They now use a rapid diagnosis test to quickly identify individuals among the migratory population who have contracted malaria and treat them prior to their return to home, limiting the further spread of the disease.

Results

About one-third of 2,400 "castañeros" tested positive for malaria, and they received immediate treatment. The USAID-sponsored pilot test demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach among mobile populations, and strengthened local capacity in early diagnosis and treatment of malaria. The Ministry of Health and the National Malaria Program have committed resources to continue this activity, with the promise of improving the health and productivity of many more Bolivians for years to come.